The Distinction Between the Terms *Mu'dal and Mu'dil*: A Manuscript-Based Analysis of Ibn Mākūlā's *Al-Ikmāl*

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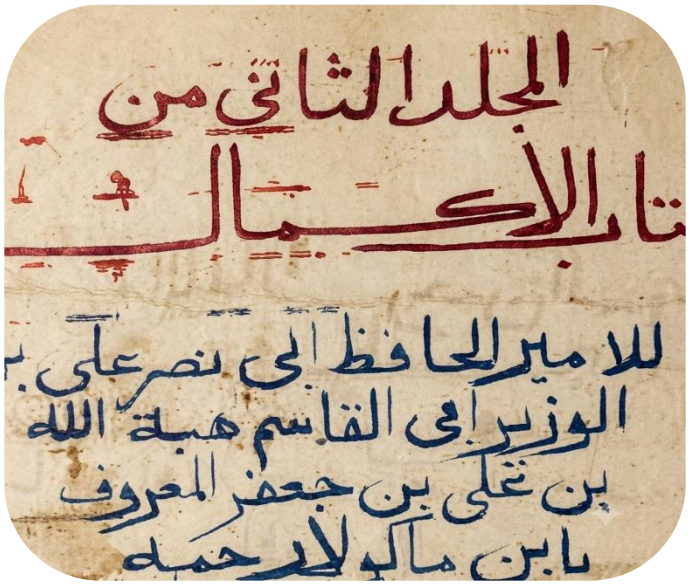

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In one of the commentaries on Ibn Ḥajar's Nuzhat al-Naẓar fī Tawḍīḥ Nukhbat al-Fikar, it is stated that while addressing the issue of gaps in the chain of transmission (isnād), Ibn Ḥajar discusses the term mu'dal and its contemporary conceptualization during his era.

Some researchers argue that a detailed examination reveals that Hadith scholars employed the terms mu'dal (with a fatḥah on the letter ḍād) and mu'dil (with a kasrah on the letter ḍād) with distinct semantic meanings. Accordingly, although Hadith scholars utilize the term mu'dal in a sense similar to that indicated by Ibn Ḥajar in his Nuzhah, their usage exhibits certain divergences from the specific conditions he laid out. Conversely, the term mu'dil conveys an entirely different meaning within Hadith methodology.

In Nuzhat al-Naẓar, Ibn Ḥajar defines the term mu'dal as follows:

"The third category of gaps in the chain of transmission (isnād) occurs when two or more consecutive narrators are

omitted; this is termed mu‘dal.”[1]

According to Ibn Ḥajar, the sequential omission of two or more narrators within the chain constitutes a mu‘dal tradition. Shortly prior to this passage, while explicating the distinction between mu‘dal and mu‘allaq, he posits an additional condition, articulating this variance as follows:

“Between it [mu‘dal] and the aforementioned [mu‘allaq], there exists a relation of general and specific overlay from a certain perspective: the term mu‘dal, when involving the omission of two or more narrators, overlaps with certain forms of mu‘allaq. Conversely, the term mu‘allaq is broader, being restricted to an omission at the beginning of the transmission chain.”[2]

Here, Ibn Ḥajar stipulates that the omission of one or more narrators must occur within the middle of the chain of transmission—that is, strictly within the body of the isnād rather than at its outset.

The terminology employed in Ibn Ḥajar’s explanations reflects the normative usage accepted by Hadith scholars of his

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[1] Nuzhat al-Naẓar fī Tawḍīḥ Nukhbat al-Fikar, by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (773–852 AH / 1372–1449 CE), critical edition with annotations by Prof. Dr. Abdullah bin Zayfullah al-Ruhaylī, 3rd ed. (1443 AH / 2021 CE), p. 110.

[2] p. 111.

era. While certain technical terms align with the conceptualizations of early scholars (al-mutaqaddimūn), others diverge from early usage.

Subsequently, commentators on Nuzhat al-Naẓar, such as Dr. Ibrāhīm al-Lāḥim, have noted that the definition provided here by Ibn Ḥajar does not align with the terminology used by earlier Hadith scholars (al-mutaqaddimūn). According to al-Lāḥim, early scholars did not employ the term mu‘dal to denote a break in the chain of transmission (isnād), but rather to characterize traditions that were regarded as severely weak (ḍa‘īf jiddan) and unfamiliar (gharīb).

In his commentary on Nuzhat al-Naẓar, Dr. Ibrāhīm al-Lāḥim states:

“The prominent early scholars engaged in Hadith criticism used the term mu‘dal not to signify a gap within the chain of transmission, but as an evaluative judgement regarding the overall reliability of the isnād. Indeed, they applied this term even to narrations that contained no break whatsoever, in order to indicate extreme weakness.”[3]

Such is the view of Dr. Ibrāhīm al-Lāḥim. Ibn Ḥajar

[3] Ibrāhīm al-Laḥḥim, Sharḥ Nuzhat al-Naẓar, Atlas al-Khaḍrāʾ Publishing House, catalogued in the King Fahd National Library, 2nd ed. (1444 AH / 2022 CE), p. 295.

himself addressed this issue in his al-Nukat ʻalā Kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, wherein he attempted to respond to the objection that his definition did not conform to the usage of earlier Hadith scholars (al-mutaqaddimūn). In this context, he sought to establish a formal distinction between muʻdal (with a fatḥah on the letter ḍād) and muʻdil (with a kasrah on the letter ḍād). He states in his work al-Nukat ʻalā Kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ:

"Once this matter is clarified, it becomes evident that Hadith scholars either employed the term muʻdal in two distinct senses, or that the term, when defined in relation to the chain of transmission (isnād), should be vocalized with a fatḥah, whereas when it appears in the dictums of the prominent Hadith authorities, it should be vocalized with a kasrah, signifying narrations that are excessively obscure and weak. Generally speaking, this distinction warrants careful attention."[4]

From these statements, it is apparent that Ibn Ḥajar recognized the divergence between his own conceptualization of the term muʻdal and that of early Hadith scholars; consequently, he proposed two distinct vocalizations to

[4] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (773–852 AH / 1372–1449 CE), al-Nukat ʿalā Kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, critical edition by Rabīʿ ibn Hādī ʿUmayr al-Madkhalī, Islamic University Research Center, Medina, Saudi Arabia, 1st ed. (1404 AH / 1984 CE), vol. 2, p. 579.

reconcile this discrepancy.

In summary, Ibn Ḥajar's resolution posits that when earlier Hadith scholars applied the term to severely weak (ḍa'īf jiddan) and unfamiliar (gharīb) traditions, they vocalized it as mu'dil (with a kasrah on the ḍād). Conversely, when designating an isnād in which two consecutive narrators were omitted, they vocalized it as mu'dal (with a fatḥah on the ḍād). Through this linguistic distinction, Ibn Ḥajar sought to bring his own definition into alignment with early scholarly usage.

While Ibn Ḥajar offered this explanation, Dr. Ibrāhīm al-Lāḥim rejected his proposed distinction in his commentary on Nuzhat al-Naẓar, critiquing it with the remark:

"This possibility remains highly improbable."[5]

The primary impetus behind the present study, however, stems from a particularly compelling and valuable codicological finding.

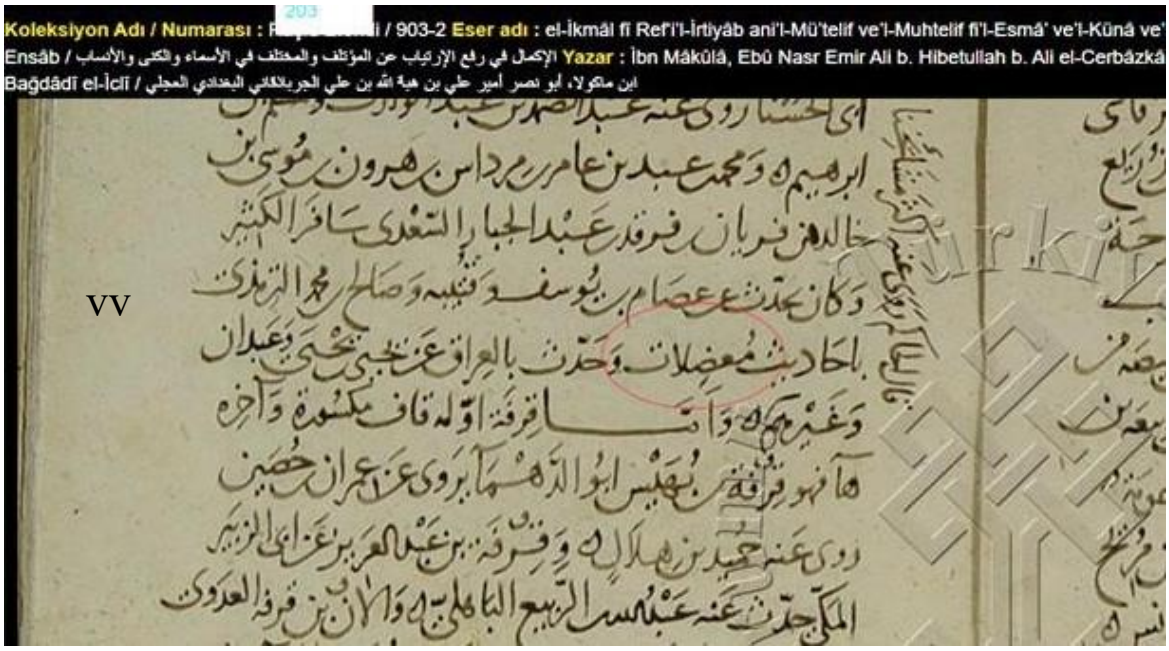
Upon examining early manuscript witnesses of Ibn Mākūlā's al-Ikmāl fī Raf' al-Irtiyāb 'an al-Mu'talif wa-al-Mukhtalif fī al-Asmā wa-al-Kunā wa-al-Ansāb, several researchers uncovered significant textual evidence: whenever the scribe transcribed the term in question to denote a weak and anomalous narration, it was explicitly vocalized with a

[5] p. 295.

kasrah—rendering it mu‘dil.

This manuscript evidence provides a robust counterargument to Dr. Ibrāhīm al-Lāḥim’s assertion that such a distinction is “highly improbable,” offering crucial empirical support for the validity of Ibn Ḥajar’s categorization. Building upon this insight, I located and examined the relevant manuscript preserved in the Kayseri Library in Türkiye—an unstudied witness that has not been utilized in prior scholarship.

Below is the folio from this manuscript, where the scribe’s explicit vocalization of the term as mu‘dilāt is highlighted with a red underline: [6]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Ensâb / الإكمال في رفع الإرتياب عن المؤتلف والمختلف في الأسماء والكنى والأنساب Yazar : İbn Mâkûlâ, Ebû Nasr Emir Ali b. Hibetullah b. Ali el-Cerbâzkâ
Bağdâdî el-İclî / ابن ماكولا، أبو نصر أمير علي بن هبة الله بن علي الجربالقاني البغدادي العجلي
vv

[6] Ibn Mākūlā, al-Ikmāl (manuscript), Kayseri Library, Rāshid Efendi Collection, Collection No. 903-2, Bibliographic Record No. 435457.

To better understand how Ibn Mākūlā employs this term and the specific semantic meaning he intends, it is instructive to examine his own phrasing. In al-Ikmāl, he writes:

"Farqad ibn Ḥajjāj Abū Naṣīr was a native of Basra. He heard Hadith from ʻUqbah ibn Abī al-Ḥusnā, while ʻAbd al-Ṣamad ibn ʻAbd al-Wārith and Muslim ibn Ibrāhīm reported from him. As for Muḥammad ibn ʻAbd ibn ʻĀmir ibn Mirdās ibn Hārūn ibn Mūsā ibn Khālid ibn Firyān ibn Farqad ibn ʻAbd al-Jabbār al-Saʻdī, he traveled extensively and transmitted narrations containing muʻdil Hadiths from Aṣam ibn Yūsuf, Qutaybah, and Ṣāliḥ ibn Muḥammad al-Tirmidhī. He also transmitted Hadith in Iraq from Yaḥyā ibn Yaḥyā, ʻAbdān, and others. Al-Ḥākim noted: 'Most of our senior scholars reported Hadith from him.'"[7]

Here, it is evident that Ibn Mākūlā utilizes the term muʻdil (with a kasrah on the letter ḍād) to characterize narrations afflicted with severe weakness and confusion (iḍṭirāb).

Furthermore, additional textual evidence demonstrates that when Hadith scholars employed the term muʻdal to signify an

[7] Ibn Mākūlā (d. 475 AH / 1082 CE), al-Ikmāl fī Rafʿ al-Irtiyāb ʿan al-Muʾtalif wa al-Mukhtalif fī al-Asmāʾ wa al-Kunā wa al-Ansāb, corrected edition with annotations by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Yaḥyā al-Muʿallimī al-Yamānī (d. 1386 AH / 1966 CE), Ottoman Academy of Sciences, India, 1st ed. (1381–1386 AH / 1961–1966 CE), vol. 7, p. 63.

omission of two or more narrators within the chain of transmission (isnād), they explicitly vocalized the letter ḍād with a fatḥah. For instance, in certain manuscript witnesses of Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī's Maʿrifat ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth, the following passage appears:

"Regarding the twelfth category of Hadith sciences, namely muʿdal narrations.(…) The authority in Hadith, ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Madīnī, along with our subsequent leading scholars, noted that muʿdal narrations refer to instances where a tradition attributed to the Prophet—as a mursal transmission—has two or more missing links between the transmitter and the Prophet."[8]

Below, I present the image from this manuscript folio, which illustrates that the letter ḍād is explicitly vocalized with a fatḥah. This empirical evidence further demonstrates that the distinction formulated by Ibn Ḥajar was not merely a theoretical conjecture, but rather an established historical reality substantiated by primary manuscript sources. [9]

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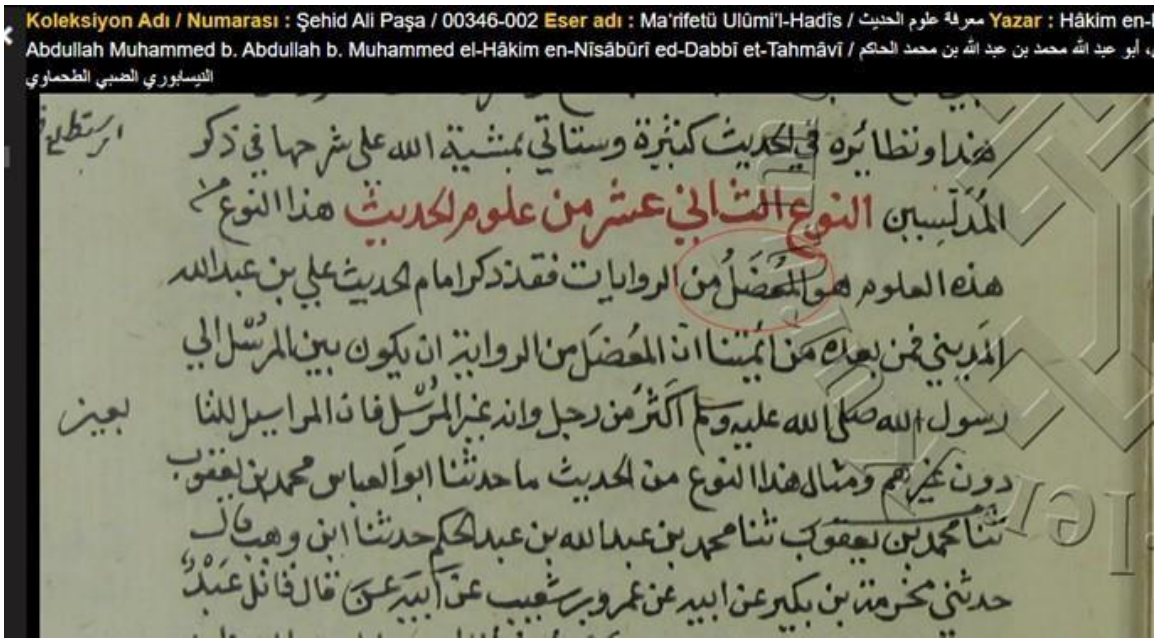
[8] al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405 AH / 1014 CE), Maʿrifat ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth, prepared for publication and corrected by Dr. Sayyid Muʿaẓẓam, 1st ed. (1356 AH / 1937 CE), Ottoman Academy of Sciences, Hyderabad-Deccan, India, p. 36.

[9] al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, Maʿrifat ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth (manuscript), Süleymaniye Library, Şehid Ali Paşa Collection, Collection No. 00346-002, Bibliographic Record No. 327369.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Abdullah Muhammed b. Abdullah b. Muhammed el-Hâkim en-Nîsâbûrî ed-Dabbî et-Tahmâvî / ابو عبد الله محمد بن عبد الله بن محمد الحاكم
النيسابوري الضبي الطحماوي
النوع الثاني عشر من علوم الحديث
المدلس

Ultimately, these primary manuscript witnesses substantiate Ibn Ḥajar’s distinction, proving that mu‘dal and mu‘dil served as distinct technical terms within early Hadith literature.

Authored by Burak Demirci